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FACT SHEET

February 2006

Jury System Improvement Program

“Jury service lies at the heart of our American judicial system. It is the duty and responsibility of all qualified citizens, but it is also an opportunity to contribute to our system of justice and to our communities.”

Hon. Ronald M. George
Chief Justice of California

Blue Ribbon Commission and Task Force

In response to widespread calls for change, the Chief Justice and the Judicial Council created the Blue Ribbon Commission on Jury System Improvement in 1995, with the State Bar of California and the California Judges Association as supporting sponsors. The council directed the commission to undertake a thorough and comprehensive review of all aspects of the jury system. The commission studied jury practices, held hearings to gather testimony, and reported its findings and recommendations for action.

Blue ribbon commission recommendation 2.1 was a proposal to the Judicial Council to create a task force to oversee implementation of the commission's recommendations. The Chief Justice appointed members to the Task Force on Jury System Improvements beginning in October of 1998 and extended the term of each member through December 2002.

The overarching principle embedded in the commission's recommendations and in the subsequent activities of the task force is that everyone should share responsibility for improving the jury system. Judges, jury commissioners, lawyers, employers, and jurors were all asked to contribute to jury system reform.

Accomplishments

Statewide jury orientation video

Ideals Made Real is California's first official jury orientation video. It provides a thoughtful and accessible overview of the juror experience, featuring interviews with former jurors and an introduction to the one-day or one-trial system. While the 14-

minute video was designed for viewing in the jury assembly room or the courtroom to help courts prepare jurors for this important civic duty, it also serves as a valuable public education tool.

For a copy of the video or more information about juror orientation, please contact Tim Newman at the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) at 415-865-7614 or by e-mail at tim.newman@jud.ca.gov.

Model juror summons

Beginning in 1999, the task force collected and reviewed sample one-step summonses from courts around the state and identified the basic elements of a summons. To clarify and simplify the summons, the task force decided to put introductory court information—such as the dress code for jurors, court amenities, and frequently asked questions—in a separate pamphlet sent with the summons, so that the summons could have a cleaner, more open layout. The task force then worked with design and communications consultants to develop and refine drafts of the model summons and the juror information pamphlet. The task force's goals were to:

- Improve the appearance and readability of the summons;
- Eliminate the costs of a two-step process in favor of a one-step summons; and
- Create a summons with consumer appeal.

A working group of court executives helped to roll out the model summons to more courts in 2004 and 2005, with technical assistance from the AOC. The Superior Courts of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties began using a common summons and brochure in March 2005 and the courts in San Francisco, Alameda, and Contra Costa Counties will be using a common summons in the spring of 2006.

Increased juror compensation

In July 2000 jurors began receiving \$15 per day on the second day of jury service and every day of service thereafter. This—the first increase in 43 years—was the Judicial Council's first step toward its goal of increasing juror fees to \$40 per day.

One-day or one-trial

In May 1999 the Judicial Council adopted rule 861 of the California Rules of Court to create a one-day or one-trial jury system throughout the state. This means that people are not required to come to court more than once every 12 months. Typically, if you are not selected for a jury after one day at the courthouse, then your service is done for at least one year. If you are chosen to serve on a jury, after the trial is over your service is also completed for at least a year and often longer.

Jury system monitoring

Jury Data Survey

Staff from the AOC Jury Improvement Program and Office of Court Research worked with jury managers statewide to establish consistent data terminology for collecting information annually. Jury managers in each trial court complete a comprehensive survey about critical components of jury administration and management practices, including the implementation of legislative and rule of court requirements initiated by the commission and the task force.

JINetwork

The goal of the JINetwork (or Jury Improvement Network) is to enhance jury service statewide. JINetwork is a knowledge- and resource-sharing tool for court administrators, jury managers, and judges. JINetwork includes a listserv and companion Web site where projects, information, and ideas are shared. The listserv allows courts and the AOC to communicate with each other and exchange information about local policies, procedures, and perspectives that will improve jury service.

Other rules and standards

The Judicial Council has adopted the following California Rules of Court and Standards of Judicial Administration based on the blue ribbon commission's and task force's recommendations and legislation:

- Rule 858 (Scheduling accommodations for jurors and peace officers)—The jury commissioner should accommodate a prospective juror's schedule by granting the juror's request for a one-time deferral of jury service. If a prospective juror is a peace officer, the jury commissioner must make scheduling accommodations upon receiving the peace officer's application setting forth the reason a scheduling accommodation is necessary.
- Rule 859 (Deferral of jury service)—A mother who is breastfeeding a child may request that her jury service be deferred for up to one year and may renew that request as long as she is breastfeeding. If the request is made in writing, under penalty of perjury, the jury commissioner must grant it without requiring the prospective juror to appear at court.
- Rule 860 (Granting excuses from jury service) requires, rather than encourages, jury commissioners to apply standards for hardship excuses as set forth in then-section 4.5 of the Standards of Judicial Administration.

- Revised section 4.5 of the Standards of Judicial Administration recommends that each court establish a reasonable mechanism for receiving and responding to juror complaints.
- New section 4.6 recommends that the jury commissioner use the National Change of Address System or other comparable means to update juror lists.
- Section 25.2(a) promotes the education of judicial officers in juror treatment and the process of jury selection, using AOC Education Division/Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER) materials and programs. Examples include the *Bench Handbook: Jury Management* (rev. 2004), *Juries: Strategies for Better Trials* (video 3625), and other CJER materials.
- Section 25.3(a) promotes the development of CJER curricula on the treatment of jurors and the process of jury selection.
- Section 25.6(h) encourages the presiding judge of each trial court to ensure that all court administrators and court employees who interact with jurors are properly trained in the appropriate treatment of jurors.

Web Site

For more information, please refer to the detailed resource guide on jury service in California, on the California Courts Web site at www.courtinfo.ca.gov/jury/.

Contact:

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Additional resources:

Task Force on Jury System Improvements Final Report at
www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/documents/tfjsi_final.pdf

Final Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Jury System Improvement at
www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/documents/BlueRibbonFullReport.pdf

Increasing the Jury Pool: Impact of the Employer Tax Credit at
www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/documents/tax_credit_report.pdf

Does Jury Size Matter? A Review of the Literature at
www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/documents/jury_size_report.pdf

Examining Voir Dire in California at
www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/documents/voir_dire_report.pdf